

Message Text

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C O N F I D E T N I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BERLIN 03604

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, GE
SUBJECT: GDR WRITERS CONGRESS: PREPARATIONS

REF: BERLIN 1358

1. SUMMARY: THE 8TH GDR WRITERS CONGRESS WILL TAKE PLACE IN EAST BERLIN AT THE END OF MAY. THIS WILL BE THE FIRST NATIONAL MEETING OF EAST GERMAN WRITERS SINCE THE BIERMANN OUSTER FROM THE GDR IN THE FALL OF 1976. THE PARTY AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE WRITERS UNION ARE TAKING PRECAUTIONS TO ENSURE THAT THE CONGRESS IS NOT CONTROVERSIAL. THE PROMINENT EAST GERMAN WRITERS WHO HAVE VOICED
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OPPOSITION TO GDR CULTURAL POLICIES IN THE PAST WILL BE ABSENT - BY A COMBINATION OF EXCLUSION BY THE WRITERS UNION AND BOYCOTT, AND WE EXPECT THE CONFERENCE TO REAFFIRM EXISTING GDR CULTURAL POLICY. END SUMMARY.

2. UNDER THE GENERAL THEME OF "THE RESPONSIBILITY

OF THE WRITERS IN SOCIALIST SOCIETY," THE 8TH CONGRESS OF THE WRITERS UNION OF THE GDR WILL TAKE PLACE IN EAST BERLIN FROM MAY 29 TO 31. THE CONGRESS, WHICH MEETS EVERY THREE OR FOUR YEARS, WILL BE ATTENDED BY APPROXIMATELY 400 DELEGATES REPRESENTING WRITERS, CRITICS AND TEACHERS, ELECTED IN LOCAL CHAPTERS OF THE WRITERS UNION OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS. THIS WILL BE THE FIRST CONGRESS SINCE 1973 AND THE FIRST SINCE THE DISRUPTIVE BIERMANN AFFAIR IN 1976 AND THE SUBSEQUENT UNREST AND DEPARTURE OF MANY PROMINENT EAST GERMAN WRITERS. IN MARCH OF 1977 DURING THE LAST MEETING OF THE BERLIN CHAPTER OF THE WRITERS UNION, STEFAN HEYM CALLED FOR AN OPEN DISCUSSION OF THE PLACE AND ROLE OF THE WRITER IN SOCIALIST SOCIETY. WITH THE BIERMANN AFFAIR STILL FRESH IN EVERYONE'S MIND, NO SUCH DISCUSSION WAS PERMITTED BUT THE INCIDENT BECAME WIDELY KNOWN AND APPEARS TO HAVE CAUSED THE ESTABLISHMENT WRITERS AND THE REGIME SOME EMBARRASSMENT.

3. ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE REGIME, INCLUDING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE WRITERS UNION, IS TAKING NO CHANCES THAT THERE WILL BE A REPETITION OF THE MARCH DISSENTION OR THAT THE CONGRESS WILL GET OUT OF HAND AND SOW DISSENT. THROUGH CAREFUL PLANNING AND MASSIVE CONFIDENTIAL

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AGITATION THE CONGRESS IS BEING TURNED INTO A NON-EVENT. HONECKER HAS GIVEN THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONGRESS HIS PERSONAL ATTENTION -- AN INDICATION OF THE SERIOUSNESS WHICH THE REGIME ATTRIBUTES TO THE CONGRESS.

4. IN HIS SPEECH TO THE PARTY KRIES FIRST SECRETARIES IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, PARTY CHIEF HONECKER REAFFIRMED THE CENTRAL POSITION OF SOCIALIST REALISM IN THE CULTURAL PROGRAM OF THE SED. HE TOLD THE DISTRICT PARTY LEADERSHIPS TO "DEEPEN THE UNDERSTANDING" OF WRITERS AND ARTISTS CONCERNING THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND CLARIFY THE ROLE WHICH LITERATURE AND ART PLAY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIALIST SOCIETY. THIS EDUCATION PROCESS WAS TO TAKE PLACE PRIMARILY WITHIN ARTISTS' ORGANIZATIONS. THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE WRITERS CONGRESS APPEAR TO BE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROGRAM.

5. HONECKER, ALONG WITH KURT HAGER, MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO AND PARTY SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, MET WITH THE LEADERSHIP OF THE WRITERS UNION ON MARCH 3.

GERHARD HENNIGER, THE FIRST VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNION, ASSURED HONECKER THAT THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONGRESS HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST BETWEEN THE WRITERS AND THE "PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS." HONECKER IN TURN EXPRESSED THANKS TO THE WRITERS OF THE GDR FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIALIST SOCIETY.

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6. SPEAKING TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ON MAY 24, ON THE EVE OF THE CONGRESS, HONECKER NOTED THAT THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONGRESS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT IN A "POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL" AND ARTISTIC ATMOSPHERE. HE STATED THAT A MAJORITY OF WRITERS HAD TAKEN PART IN THE DISCUSSIONS ON THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALIST-REALIST LITERATURE. HE REFERRED TO HIS MARCH 3 MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WRITERS UNION AND SAID THAT THE SED IS CONVINCED THAT THE WRITERS ARE CONSCIOUS OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY IN THE STRUGGLE OF OUR

TIME AND WILL OPERATE IN CLOSE AGREEMENT WITH THE
PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS AS ACTIVE MEMBERS OF A
DEVELOPING SOCIALIST SOCIETY.
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7. FIVE "WORKING GROUPS" WERE
ESTABLISHED TO CARRY OUT "POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL
WORK" IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CONGRESS. THEY
DISCUSSED SUCH THEMES AS "LITERATURE AND THE WORLD"
AND "WORK AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN OUR LITERATURE."
THERE HAS ALSO BEEN HEAVY TREATMENT IN ALL OF THE
MASS MEDIA INCLUDING FEATURE ARTICLES, INTERVIEWS,
ETC. STRESSING THE MAIN THEMES OF THE CONGRESS:
THE PRIMACY OF THE SOCIALIST REALIST APPROACH, THE
IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTING WORKING CLASS AND
IDEOLOGICALLY PURE MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES, AND
THE NEED FOR LOYALTY TO THE SOCIALIST STATE
AND TO THE PARTY AS THE LEADING FORCE OF THE PEOPLE.
IN A RECENT MEETING POLITBURO
MEMBER AND HEAD OF THE EAST GERMAN TRADE UNIONS, HARRY
TISCH SUGGESTED TO A GROUP FROM THE WRITERS UNION THAT
YOUNG WRITERS SPEND A YEAR IN AN ENTERPRISE SO THAT THEY
COULD FIND SUBJECTS CLOSE TO REALITY TO WRITE ABOUT.
GUENTER GOERLICH, CHAIRMAN OF THE BERLIN CHAPTER OF THE
WRITERS UNION TOLD UNION MEMBERS THAT THEY MUST SUPPORT
THE POLICIES OF THE 8TH AND 9TH PARTY CONGRESS AND MUST
WORK ENERGETICALLY TO IMPLEMENT THE PARTY PROGRAM.

8. MISSING FROM THE PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND FROM THE
PUBLICITY HAVE BEEN SUCH PROMINENT EAST GERMAN WRITERS AS
GUENTER KUNERT, CHRISTA WOLF, ULRICH PLENZDORF, STEFAN
HEYM, ROLF SCHNEIDER, KLAUS SCHLESINGER AND OTHERS WHO HAD
SIGNED OR SUPPORTED THE BIERMANN PETITION. IN APRIL, THE
BERLIN SECTION OF THE WRITERS UNION MET AND EXCLUDED FROM
PARTICIPATION AT THE CONGRESS MOST OF THE PROMINENT BERLIN
WRITERS WHO WERE SIGNERS OF THE BIERMANN PETITION AND WHO
REMAIN IN EAST BERLIN. (THREE SIGNERS WILL BE REPRESENTED:
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STEFAN HERMLIN, GUNTER DE BRUYN AND VOLKER BRAUN.)
JURICH BECKER, ONE OF THE LEADING SUPPORTERS OF THE
BIERMANN PETITION, IS NOW IN THE UNITED STATES ON A LEC-
TURE TOUR. IN SOME CASES THE WRITERS EXCLUDED WERE INDIF-
FERENT TO THIS ACTION AS THEY HAD NO INTENTION OF PARTI-
CIPATING IN THE CONGRESS IN ANY CASE. HEYM RECENTLY DIS-

CUSSED THE UPCOMING CONGRESS WITH THE PAO IN VITRIOLIC TERMS, PREDICTING THAT THE RESULTS WOULD BE STANDARD RECITATIONS OF THE OFFICIAL LINE ON CULTURAL POLICY. ONLY WRITERS "NOMINATED" BY THE LOCAL GROUPS WOULD ATTEND THE CONGRESS, HE SAID, AND HE HAD NOT BEEN NOMINATED. HOWEVER, EVEN IF HEYM HAD BEEN SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE HE AVOWED THAT HE WOULD NOT HAVE DONE SO. HEYM ALSO NOTED THE IRONY OF SOME OF THE CENTRAL THEMES OF THE CONGRESS. AT THE MARCH 1977 MEETING HE HAD DEMANDED A BROAD DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE OF WRITERS IN THE SOCIETY AND HAD BEEN IGNORED. NOW THE 8TH WRITERS CONGRESS HAD ADOPTED THIS IDEA AS ITS OWN GENERAL THEME BUT, ACCORDING TO HEYM, NOT IN THE WAY THAT HE HAD INTENDED AS A SERIOUS DISCUSSION BUT RATHER AS A MASS GENUFLECTION TO THE OFFICIAL LINE.

9. ONE OF THOSE WHO HAD PLANNED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WRITERS CONFERENCE WAS CHRISTA WOLF, ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT OF THE BIERMANN PETITION SIGNERS. AN AMERICAN PUBLISHER, ROGER V. STRAUS, HAS HAD PUBLISHED IN THE WEST GERMAN WEEKLY DIE ZEIT AN OPEN LETTER TO HERMANN KANT, THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE WRITERS UNION AND AMONG THE MOST DISTINGUISHED OF THE ESTABLISHMENT WRITERS, PROTESTING HER EXCLUSION. KANT, IN A LENGTHY, HEAVILY SARCASTIC OPEN LETTER TO STRAUS PUBLISHED IN NEUES

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DEUTSCHLAND MAY 24 REJECTS THE NOTION THAT CHRISTA WOLF WAS EXCLUDED. HE STATES THAT SHE WAS INVITED BUT COULD NOT ATTEND AS SHE HAD TO BE IN SWEDEN DURING THE TIME OF THE CONGRESS. (WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY A FRIEND OF CHRISTA WOLF THAT IN FACT SHE WAS PREPARED TO RETURN FROM SWEDEN TO ATTEND THE CONGRESS.) KANT CONCLUDES HIS LETTER BY SAYING THAT THE WRITERS UNION OPERATES IN A DEMOCRATIC FASHION, AND THAT IT IS NOT A "BANANA REPUBLIC" WHICH BELONGS TO SOME COMPANY. KANT'S MESSAGE IS CLEARLY THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE WRITERS UNION ELECTED ONLY THOSE THEY WANTED.

10. AMONG OUR CONTACTS IN THE LITERARY FIELD THERE SEEMS
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TO BE A COMMON VIEW THAT NOTHING OF SIGNIFICANCE WILL EMERGE FROM THE CONGRESS. THE CULTURAL EDITOR OF NEUE ZEIT, THE CDU PAPER, TOLD US HE EXPECTED NOTHING FROM THE CONGRESS AND THEREFORE PLANNED TO TAKE LEAVE AT THAT TIME. AMONG VERY YOUNG WRITERS THERE IS FRANK INDIFFERENCE TOWARD THE WHOLE AFFAIR. A MEMBER OF THE YOUNGER, UNKNOWN AND UNPUBLISHED CIRCLE OF WRITERS IN BERLIN HAS TOLD US THAT HIS PEERS REGARD THE WHOLE WRITERS CONGRESS EXERCISE AS A REFLECTION OF ESTABLISHMENT VALUES AND OFFICIALLY SANCTIONED POLICIES AND THAT IT WILL ONLY EXACERBATE FURTHER THE ALIENATION OF YOUNG WRITERS FROM THE WRITERS UNION AND THEREBY MAKE WORSE THE FRUSTRATIONS OF THESE WOULD-BE AUTHORS WHO DO NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO BE PUBLISHED BECAUSE OF LACK OF OFFICIAL APPROVAL.

11. THE SENSITIVITY OF THE WRITERS UNION IS REFLECTED BY THE FACT THAT HERMANN KANT, ONE OF THOSE WHO ATTENDED THE MARCH 3 MEETING WITH HONECKER, CONFIDED TO THE PAO THAT HE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SEE OR TALK TO ANYONE FROM THE EMBASSY UNTIL AFTER THE CONGRESS IS OVER "FOR REASONS WHICH YOU CAN UNDERSTAND."

12. COMMENT: THE MASSIVE PREPARATIONS BY THE PARTY AND THE WRITERS UNION COUPLED WITH THE FACT THAT THE FEW REMAINING CRITICS IN THE UNION HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED OR FOR THE TIME BEING HAVE GIVEN UP TRYING TO INFLUENCE GDR CULTURAL POLICY WILL PROBABLY MEAN THAT THE 8TH GDR WRITERS CONGRESS WILL AMOUNT TO A REAFFIRMATION OF EXISTING OFFICIAL CULTURAL POLICY: THE CENTRAL POSITION OF

SOCIALIST REALISM, THE IMPORTANCE OF CLASS IDENTIFICATION AND CLASS CHARACTER IN CREATIVE EFFORTS AND THE LEADING ROLE OF THE PARTY IN DETERMINING CULTURAL POLICIES. WE WOULD ALSO EXPECT TO SEE STRESSED THE
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THEME THAT SOME WRITERS HAVE LOST TOUCH WITH REALITY AND WITH THEIR READERS AND SHOULD TRY TO DEAL WITH RELEVANT THEMES. WE EXPECT THAT THE CONGRESS WILL REJECT ANY ACCOMMODATION WITH THE DISSIDENT WRITERS, SOME OF WHOM STILL GAIN PERMISSION TO TRAVEL TO THE WEST. IN ADDITION TO BECKER, KUNERT WENT TO FRANCE IN MARCH; HEINER MULLER DELIVERED LECTURES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS; SCHLESINGER JUST RETURNED FROM FRANCE AND ROLF SCHNEIDER, WHOSE MANUSCRIPT ON THE BIERMANN AFFAIR, WAS REJECTED FOR PUBLICATION IN THE GDR, IS ON A TOUR IN THE FRG.

13. A STRIKING FEATURE OF THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONGRESS IS THE LENGTH THE REGIME IS GOING TO AVOID PUBLIC CONTROVERSY DURING THE COURSE OF THE MEETING AND THE IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO GETTING THE MEMBERS OF THE WRITERS UNION BACK IN LINE. THE WELL-KNOWN, ARTICULATE DISSIDENT WRITERS REMAINING IN THE GDR ARE ONLY A HANDFUL - PERHAPS NO MORE THAN A DOZEN - AND ARE PROBABLY NOT VERY INFLUENTIAL AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC. DESPITE THIS, THE REGIME IS OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE EFFECT OF AN OPEN DEBATE AND IS WILLING TO PREVENT IT EVEN AT THE RISK OF FURTHER ALIENATING EAST GERMAN WRITERS.
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